

8 October 1986

EX-CIA ANALYST BLAMES ANECDOTES FOR MEXICO FEARS  
BY ROBERT PARRY  
WASHINGTON

STAT

A former senior CIA analyst says anecdotes and doomsday predictions from President Reagan's political backers fueled U.S. government fears of upheaval in Mexico and created pressure to alter intelligence assessments.

In an article scheduled for publication this month, John R. Horton, who retired as the CIA's top Latin American analyst in 1984 after a dispute with CIA Director William J. Casey over Mexico, said administration officials were deeply influenced by anecdotal accounts about Mexican instability.

Horton describes "interested businessmen trooping through ... Reagan administration offices with hair-raising tales of crisis in Mexico" and the resulting pressure on intelligence analysts to confirm the severity of the problem.

"What aggravated the difficulty of trying to describe Mexico was the power of the anecdotes and the persistent allegations of eventual collapse in Mexico," he said. "The allegations were backed by rumors, by the anecdotes themselves, as well as by the selective use of information." Horton cites an anecdote of a businessman from California who said in 1983 that his partner in Mexico City "kept his plane constantly warmed up so that he could leave in a hurry. ...

"You cannot help wondering (three years later): Are the partner and his airplane still there? Is the engine still running?" Horton's departure two years ago as the CIA's national intelligence officer for Latin America prompted complaints that Casey was politicizing the agency and pressuring analysts to issue reports that conformed to administration preconceptions.

But Horton has refused to discuss his departure in detail and his 11-page article appearing in the "International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence" reviews the CIA's handling of the Mexican issue only in general terms.

Asked about the article, CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson declined to discuss the Mexican case, but noted that preparing an intelligence estimate traditionally involves "give-and-take" among analysts and the various intelligence agencies.

She said Horton "is entitled to his point of view" and noted that he "complies with his obligation" to submit his writings to the CIA for review to avoid publication of government secrets.

In the article, Horton said some of Reagan's political appointees likened Mexico in the early 1980s to Iran in the days before the Shah of Iran fell. That analysis foresaw the potential of a revolutionary, anti-American state on the U.S. border.

"This doomsday view of Mexico led to differences of opinion between those in the administration who held it and the professional, career people in the places that mattered - State and the CIA," Horton said.

While shaking the complacency of analysts who saw Mexico as a troubled but stable country, the dispute forced "an expensive redundancy in both collection of information and the analysis of it," the former CIA analyst said.

"Because of the importance given the allegations about Mexico, resources were taken from other important work in an effort to dig up evidence to support the shaky allegations," he said.

Horton said two different bodies in the intelligence community were examining Mexico at the same time - one preparing a national intelligence estimate at Casey's direction and the other a special task force of experts.

"But neither the national intelligence estimate nor the final report of the task force satisfied those who felt they had all the answers about Mexico. The system worked; that is, the intelligence system did not disgorge the dogmatic, doctrinal conclusion about Mexico's future that it had been invited to espouse."